

PRESSBOOK

JR

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The 20 Most Influential Artists of 2017

[artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-20-influential-artists-2017](https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-20-influential-artists-2017)



B. 1983, Paris. Lives and works in Paris and New York

In September, a 70-foot-tall baby was spotted crawling across the arid borderland between Mexico and California. The brainchild of 34-year-old French photographer and street artist JR, *Kikito*—as the gargantuan black-and-white toddler is affectionately named—peeps curiously from the Mexican side of a fence erected at Tecate, roughly 45 miles southeast of San Diego. JR is known for his deeply humanist, architecturally scaled outdoor works that often appear in areas of socioeconomic disparity or cultural contention. These include *Women are Heroes* (2008), which featured the eyes of local women smattered across the sides of buildings in Rio de Janeiro's oldest favela, and *Wrinkles of the City*, a collaboration with José Parlá for the 2012 Havana Biennial that included depictions of elderly Cubans who lived through their country's revolution in the 1950s. His habit of surreptitiously muralizing public walls has prompted some to call him the French Banksy.

Thanks to the help of Tecate-area residents, *Kikito* went up in a matter of days after President Trump's decision to repeal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which offers legal protection to some who entered the U.S. illegally as minors, often with

their parents. It's hard to disassociate the image of a giant child behind an imperious metal barricade from the contentious presidential mandate. But the work also effectively makes light of Trump's campaign promise and Executive Order to build an expansive, high-security border wall, making the existing stretch of wall at Tecate seem flimsy indeed: surmountable by a baby.

2017 also saw JR install a 150-square-meter mural at the Palais de Tokyo, take over the Renzo Piano pavilion at Château La Coste, and notch a show at the Paris location of Perrotin. He also debuted *Faces/Places*, a documentary created with legendary 89-year-old Belgian filmmaker Agnès Varda. It documents their interactions with the people of rural France whom the unlikely duo meet while traveling around the country creating portraits of those they encounter. The understated and poignant film—in which Varda likens JR to a young Jean Luc-Godard—won the L'Œil d'Or award when it premiered at May's Cannes Film Festival, and it was met with critical acclaim when it was released in October (and later landed on the shortlist of Oscar nominations for Best Documentary).